

DISTROHOPPER

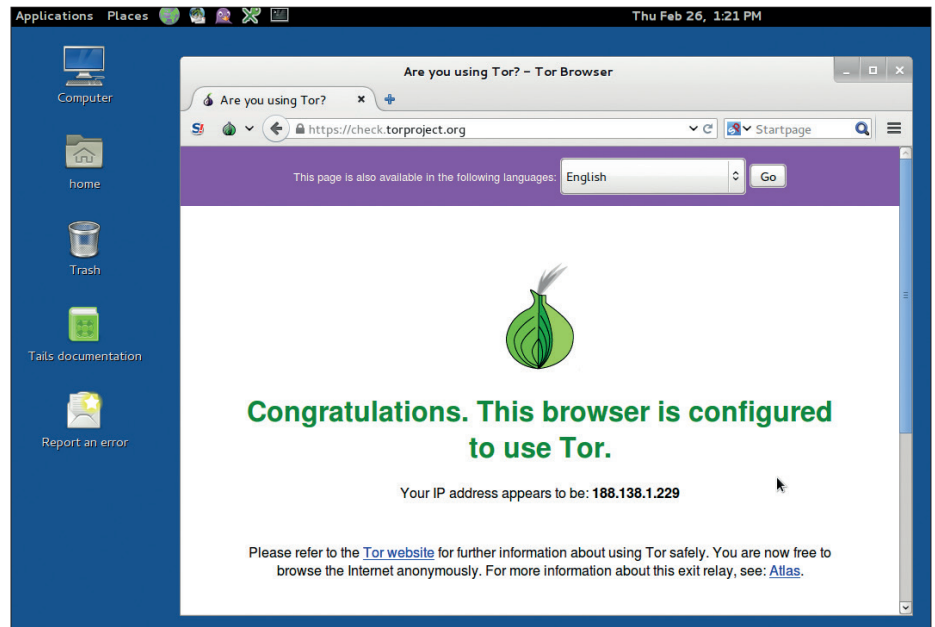
Our pick of the latest releases will whet your appetite for new Linux distributions.

Tails 1.3

Secret and safe.

Governments and law enforcement agencies may be hell-bent on monitoring every single thing we do and say, but geeks are fighting back. Tails (<https://tails.boum.org>) is a live Linux distribution that routes all internet traffic through the Tor anonymising network, and it doesn't leave any traces on your hard drive. Why is this important? Well, imagine you're a journalist working in a repressive regime. With Tails, you can boot the distro from a DVD or USB key, do your work online, reboot and destroy the Tails media. If your machine is confiscated, there's no way to tell that you were using Tor – at least, that's the goal.

The Tails developers are keen to point out, however, that it's not a 100% perfect solution for anonymity. Network traffic is encrypted as it moves around between Tor nodes, but it's plain to see when it leaves an exit node, and you can't guarantee that all exit nodes are operated by do-gooders. Also, you have to be very careful when signing into services on the web. There's no point using Tails and



Tails 1.3 includes a new Bitcoin wallet and the obfs4 pluggable transport to disguise Tor traffic.

Tor to stay anonymous if you then sign into Facebook or other data-harvesting services.

Tails 1.3 boots to a Gnome desktop with *Firefox*, *Claws Mail* and the *Pidgin* instant messenger, all using the Tor network. If any program tries to access the internet directly,

and not through Tor, it gets blocked. Plus there are some extra tweaks for privacy – like the use of StartPage as the default search engine in *Firefox*, which uses Google to get search engine results, but doesn't share your IP address.

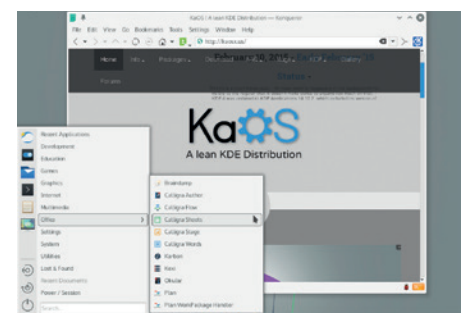
KaOS 2015.02

Gorgeous rolling distro showcasing the latest KDE.

KaOS (<http://kaosx.us>) is described on its website as a "lean KDE distribution" – but isn't that something of an oxymoron? KDE is the most featureful and customisable desktop environment in existence, but few would describe it as "lean". In KaOS, though, that word is used to describe the whole experience and not just the desktop. KaOS focuses entirely on one desktop (KDE), one toolkit (*Qt*), one architecture (x86-64) and one release model. Unlike many distros, it doesn't try to be a jack of all trades; it has a razor-sharp focus, and won't budge from it.

Well, for now at least. The KaOS developers are considering a switch away from the Linux kernel in the future, possibly to Illumos (a derivative of OpenSolaris). We're always open to other FOSS operating systems at Linux Voice, but we're not sure what Illumos would bring – sure, it has some high-end features useful if you're running giant databases on big iron, but it doesn't have anywhere near the same level of x86 hardware support.

KaOS 2015.02 uses the KDE Plasma 5 desktop, and is one of the best-looking KDE configurations we've ever seen. Subtle



KaOS is a rolling-release distro, so you install it once and receive gradual updates.

animations and drop shadows abound, while the fonts and icons complete the package excellently. You won't find many non-KDE or *Qt* programs here – *Konqueror* is the only web browser installed by default, and *Calligra* provides the office suite.

ArchBang

Arch Linux goodness, without the installation hassles.

Back in issue 7's cover feature, we declared Arch Linux as the best all-round distribution. It's always up to date, it has a giant range of software via the Arch User Repositories, and its documentation is second to none. It's not ideal for newbies or for long-term Debian-esque stability, but for those who don't mind dabbling at the command line now and then, performing the occasional fix, it's bliss.

The installation process teaches you a lot about the underpinnings of a Linux system, but it can become a chore when you've done it several times. So ArchBang (www.archbang.org) has become one of our favourite distros in the last 12 months – it gets you up and running with an Arch installation quickly, so you can avoid the tedious parts of the installation process.

ArchBang is inspired by CrunchBang Linux, sporting a minimalist desktop with Openbox as the window manager and a small selection of tools. Unlike some Arch-based distros, ArchBang doesn't have its own special repositories – it's simply a means to get a working Arch setup in just a



ArchBang's default theme is dark and moody, but it's easy to brighten it up.

few keypresses. Its main feature is its installer, which simplifies the process of getting Arch onto your hard drive; it's a menu-driven tool and easy to navigate for intermediate and experienced Linux users.

Otherwise, the distro is pretty bare: it includes *Firefox* and a few other tools, but the idea is that you get it installed and then add what you need via *Pacman* and the regular Arch repositories.

MuLinux – desktop Linux on two floppy disks!

Here's a question: how much space do you need for a graphical Linux installation with a file manager, terminal emulator and various other utilities? If a typical Ubuntu installation weighs in at around 2.5GB, you might think that you could squeeze the bare necessities into 200MB or so. Well, go even further: it's actually possible to get some GUI goodness in under 3MB. MuLinux (<http://micheleandreoli.org/public/Software/mulinux/>) is a long-defunct project that caught some attention in the early 2000s by managing to pack an extraordinary amount of Linux onto a few floppy disks.

The first disk provided the base system, and then you could beef it up with extra disks containing the X Window System, *GCC*, Perl, *Wine* and even a Java virtual machine (*Kaffe*). Most of these programs were highly stripped-down in order to fit into the limited space, but it was nonetheless an impressive achievement, and showed what's possible when you take every kilobyte into consideration. And today, it makes you wonder what on earth happened to modern operating systems to bloat them up so much – why does Windows 10 need 16GB of hard drive space?

Although MuLinux ceased development over a decade ago, there have been similar projects in recent years. Tiny Core Linux (<http://distro.ibiblio.org/tinycorelinux>) crams a GUI Linux distro into just 12MB, and while it's not all that useful on its own, you can use it as a base for bigger projects such as a web kiosk or similar installation.

It may look pants today, but MuLinux was an astonishing feat at the time.

